

8. What You Can Do To Protect Your Drinking Water

Drinking water protection is a shared responsibility. Many actions are underway to protect our nation's drinking water, and there are many opportunities for citizens to become involved.

Be Involved!

EPA activities to protect drinking water include setting drinking water standards and overseeing the work of states that enforce federal standards—or stricter ones set by the individual state. EPA holds many public meetings on issues ranging from proposed drinking water standards to the development of databases. You can also comment on proposed drafts of other upcoming EPA documents. A list of public meetings and regulations open for comment can be found at www.epa.gov/safewater/pubinput/html.

Be Informed!

- Read the annual Consumer Confidence Report provided by your water supplier. Some Consumer Confidence Reports are available at www.epa.gov/safewater/dwinfo.htm.
- Use information from your state's Source Water Assessment to learn about potential threats to your water source.
- If you are one of the 15 percent of Americans who uses a private source of drinking water—such as a well, cistern, or spring—find out what activities are taking place in your **watershed** that may impact your drinking water; talk to local experts/test your water periodically; and maintain your well properly.
- Find out if the Clean Water Act standards for your drinking water source are intended to protect water for drinking, in addition to fishing and swimming.

Be Observant!

- Look around your watershed and look for announcements in the local media about activities that may pollute your drinking water.
- **Form and operate** a citizens watch network within your community to communicate regularly with law enforcement, your public water supplier and wastewater operator. **Communication** is key to a safer community!
- **Be alert.** Get to know your water/wastewater utilities, their vehicles, routines and their personnel.
- **Become aware of your surroundings.** This will help you to recognize suspicious activity as opposed to normal daily activities.

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Other Ways To Get Involved

- Attend public hearings on new construction, storm water permitting, and town planning.
- Keep your public officials accountable by asking to see their environmental impact statements.
- Ask questions about any issue that may affect your water source.
- Participate with your government and your water system as they make funding decisions.
- Volunteer or help recruit volunteers to participate in your community's contaminant monitoring activities.
- Help ensure that local utilities that protect your water have adequate resources to do their job.



- If you see any suspicious activities in or around your water supply, please notify local authorities or call 9-1-1 immediately to report the incident.

Stormwater runoff threatens our sources of drinking water. As this water washes over roofs, pavement, farms and grassy areas, it picks up fertilizers, pesticides and litter, and deposits them in surface water and ground water. Here are some other threats to our drinking water:

Every year:

- We apply 67 million pounds of pesticides that contain toxic and harmful chemicals to our lawns.
- We produce more than 230 million tons of municipal solid waste—approximately five pounds of trash or garbage per person per day—that contain bacteria, nitrates, viruses, synthetic detergents, and household chemicals.
- Our more than 12 million recreational and houseboats and 10,000 boat marinas release solvents, gasoline, detergents, and raw sewage directly into our rivers, lakes and streams.

Don't Contaminate!

- Reduce paved areas: use permeable surfaces that allow rain to soak through, not run off.
- Reduce or eliminate pesticide application: test your soil before applying chemicals, and use plants that require little or no water, pesticides, or fertilizers.
- Reduce the amount of trash you create: reuse and recycle.
- Recycle used oil: 1 quart of oil can contaminate 2 million gallons of drinking water—take your used oil and anti-freeze to a service station or recycling center.
- Take the bus instead of your car one day a week: you could prevent 33 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each day.
- Keep pollutants away from boat marinas and waterways: keep boat motors well-tuned to prevent leaks, select nontoxic cleaning products and use a drop cloth, and clean and maintain boats away from the water.

For more information on how you can help protect your local drinking water source, call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline, or check www.epa.gov/safewater/publicoutreach. Additional resources are listed in Appendix C.

